CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name: Land Breaking of crested wheatgrass for dryland agricultural production. State of Montana Lease Number 9347.	Proposed Implementation Date: Spring 2017
Proponent: Bruce Riggin,285 Riggin RD, Glasgow, Montana 59230	
Type and Purpose of Action: Surface lessee, Bruce Riggin is working with Montana Department of Natural Resources, Glasgow Unit Office to break and estimated 158.2 acres of crested wheatgrass rangeland. The breaking of this acreage would be for dryland agriculture production. The land breaking will involve the complete removal of all the crested wheatgrass acreage, which will be converted to dryland agriculture for the production of small grains or pulse crops. The dryland agriculture acreage will produce small grain, grain hay crops and pulse crops for the current lease term and future lease terms.	
Location: SW4, Section 34 Township 30 North Range 39E	County: Valley

I. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED: Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.	Bruce Riggin the surface lessee is working with the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation to break 158.2 acres (more or less) of crested wheatgrass on State land Lease Number 9347. The land breaking will be reviewed per Department of Natural Resources and Conservation land breaking criteria for all lands other than native sod.
2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:	The other government agencies that may have jurisdiction for this project are the United States Department of Agriculture, Farm Service Agency and United States Department of Agriculture, Department of Natural Resources and Conservation Service.
3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:	No Action Alternative: Deny permission to Bruce Riggin to break 158.2 acres of crested wheatgrass rangeland. Action Alternative: Grant permission to the surface lessee Bruce Riggin to break 158.2 acres of crested wheatgrass rangeland.

II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

RESOURCE	POTENTIAL IMPACTS
4. GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE: Are fragile, compactible or unstable soils present? Are there unusual geologic features? Are there special reclamation considerations?	No Action Alternative: The soils on the State land will remain the same and continue to produce crested wheatgrass vegetation. The area will continue to produce minimal crested wheatgrass vegetation for livestock grazing. Action Alternative: This type of project will impact the soils that are currently producing crested wheatgrass vegetation. The soils will

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	be broken up for the purpose of dryland agriculture. This acreage will be farmed for small grain, hay grain or pulse crops for the present and future lease terms. The soil type that will be broken for this conversion to dryland agriculture is: Phillips loam, 0 to 4% slopes and Thoeny-Phillips complex 1 to 5% slopes. These soil types are suitable as tame grass rangeland or dryland agriculture. These soil types have moderate hazards to wind and water erosion. The lessee will mitigate impacts for the hazards of wind and water erosion. This will be accomplished through conservation management practices such as maintaining plant litter/stubble mulch on the broken acreage. The 158.2 acres requested for breaking will maintain current soil qualities and soil stability under a dryland agriculture management plan. Mitigation: There will be areas of tract that may be flagged by Departmental personnel and left in permanent vegetative cover. The surface lessee plans to maintain plant litter/stubble mulch on the broken acreage. The annual plant litter/stubble mulch will mitigate any type of soil loss from wind or water erosion.
5. WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION: Are important surface or groundwater resources present? Is there potential for violation of ambient water quality standards, drinking water maximum contaminant levels, or degradation of water quality?	No Action Alternative: Under this alternative annual precipitation will be utilized by the crested wheatgrass plant community. There will be no impacts to water quality, quantity and distribution. Action Alternative: The project will allow the surface lessee to improve the production of the natural resource through dryland agriculture crops. The land breaking for dryland agriculture will not use water resources, other than the water associated with the topsoil from annual precipitation.
6. AIR QUALITY: Will pollutants or particulate be produced? Is the project influenced by air quality regulations or zones (Class I airshed)?	No Action Alternative: No impacts will occur to air quality under this alternative. Action Alternative: The breaking of the crested wheatgrass rangeland for dryland agriculture will have no impacts to the air quality of the State land.
7. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY: Will vegetative communities be permanently altered? Are any rare plants or cover types present?	No Action Alternative: Under this alternative the current crested wheatgrass plant community will remain intact. Action Alternative: The breaking of the crested wheatgrass plant community will permanently destroy the current plant community on the project area. The tame grass plant community consists of crested wheatgrass. Crested wheatgrass is not a rare plant cover and can be found on rangeland and edges of dryland agriculture fields.
8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS: Is there substantial use of the	No Action Alternative: The habitat types associated with a crested wheat grass plant community will remain intact.

II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT	
area by important wildlife, birds or fish?	Action Alternative: This type of activity will disturb the habitat types on the State land. The area of impact is crested wheatgrass plant community. This type of tame grass plant community has very minimal habitat resources. There will be minimal impacts to the wildlife and upland bird resources associated with the State land. There will be some areas of tract that will continue to produce a tame grass and forb plant community. The Montana Heritage Program lists the following as species of concern: Little Brown Myotis (*Vespertilionidae)*, Bairds sparrow (*Emberizidae*), Spragues Pipit (*Motacillidae)*, Chestnut collard Longspur (*Calcariidae)*, Greater Sage Grouse (*Phasianidae)*, Loggerhead Shrike *(Laniidae)*,McCowan's Longspur (*Calcariidae)* Montana Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program received a request from Randy Dirkson, Land Use Specialist, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation. The project request was to review the proposed project of breaking up 158.2 acres of crested wheatgrass for small grain and pulse crop production. The following is the written response receive at the Glasgow Unit Office to Randy Dirkson: The program has completed its review. The project proposes to change crop type from crested wheatgrass to small grain production or pulse crop in designated General Habitat for sage grouse. Based on the information you provided, your project is not within two miles of an active sage grouse lek. Recommendations: Weed management is required within General Habitat for sage grouse. Reclamation of disturbed areas must include control of noxious weeds and invasive plant species, including cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum)* and Japanese brome (*Bromus japanicas).*Your activities are consistent with the Montana Sage Grouse Conservation Strategy. Your proposed project or activity may need to obtain additions permits or authorization form other Montana state agencies or possibly federal agencies. They are very likely to request a copy of this consultation letter, so please retain it for your records. Please be aware that if the location or boundaries of your proposal project or activity change in the future or if new activities are proposed within one of the designated sage grouse habitat areas, please visit https://sagegrouse.mt.gov/projects/ and submit the new information. Thanks for your interest in sage grouse and your commitment to taking steps necessary to ensure Montana's Sage Grouse Conservation Strategy is successful. Carolyn Sime, Montana Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program Manager.

II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT	
9. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES: Are any federally listed threatened or endangered species or identified habitat present? Any wetlands? Sensitive Species or Species of special concern?	No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no change to the current environmental resources of crested wheatgrass rangeland. Action Alternative: The project area contains no known unique, endangered, fragile or limited environmental resources. The project area consists of flat to gently rolling terrain, with crested wheatgrass vegetation. There are no areas of native plant species located on this tract.
10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES: Are any historical, archaeological or paleontological resources present?	No Action Alternative: The project area has no known historical or archaeological sites and existing status would remain. Action Alternative: There are no known historical or archaeological sites on the project area that will be impacted. The project area was inspected by Matt Poole, Unit Manager Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, Glasgow Unit Office for archaeological, historical and paleontological resources. There were no historical or archaeological sites identified during the on-site inspection. The crested wheatgrass areas were altered by mechanical means in past years negating any type of historical or archaeological sites.
11. AESTHETICS: Is the project on a prominent topographic feature? Will it be visible from populated or scenic areas? Will there be excessive noise or light?	No Action Alternative: There would be no impacts that would occur to the aesthetic values associated with the State land under this alternative. Action Alternative: The project site is located in a rural area and is visible to the general public from a county road. The project will have no impacts to the aesthetic values associated with the State land involved with this project or other surrounding lands. The aesthetic values of this area are dryland agriculture acreage producing small grain and pulse crops. There are scattered tame grass/native rangelands in the vicinity of the project site. There are also scattered areas of conservation reserve program acreage scattered near project site.
12. DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, and AIR OR ENERGY: Will the project use resources that are limited in the area? Are there other activities nearby that will affect the project?	No Action Alternative: There will be no demands on environmental resources of land, water, air or energy occurring under this alternative. Action Alternative: The project will place no demands on environmental resources of land, water, air or energy. The nearby activities occurring on surrounding lands are the tillage of dryland agriculture acreage for the production of small grain and pulse crops. There are some areas where livestock grazing occurs.
13. OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO	No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there would be no changes to existing plans,

II. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT	
THE AREA: Are there other studies, plans or projects on this tract?	studies or projects that the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation may have occurring on the State land. Action Alternative: The breaking of the crested wheatgrass vegetation will not impact other projects or plans that the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation may have occurring on this tract of State land. The land breaking project will not impact surrounding deeded lands.

III. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION	
RESOURCE	POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION MEASURES
14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY: Will this project add to health and safety risks in the area?	No Action Alternative: No human health or safety risks would occur under this alterative. Action Alternative: The breaking of crested wheatgrass vegetation for dryland agriculture has minimal human health or safety risks.
15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION: Will the project add to or alter these activities?	No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no changes to current livestock grazing activities. Action Alternative: The project will enhance the surface lessee's ability to produce small grain or pulse crops on his State land lease. The production of small grains and pulse crops will increase revenue from the soils that are currently producing crested wheatgrass. The increased revenue from small grains and pulse crops will increase revenue for the School Trust. The surface lessee will also see an increase in revenue from Lease No. 9347.
16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT: Will the project create, move or eliminate jobs? If so, estimated number.	No Action Alternative: There will be no impacts to quantity and distribution of employment. Action Alternative: The project will not impact the quantity and distribution of employment. The land breaking of the crested wheatgrass will be accomplished by the surface lessee or his designated hired labor force.
17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES: Will the project create or eliminate tax revenue?	No Action Alternative: No local and state tax base and tax revenues would be impacted under this alternative. Action Alternative: The project will have no impacts on the local or state tax base.
18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES: Will substantial traffic be added to existing roads? Will other services (fire protection, police, schools, etc) be needed?	No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no demands for government services. Action Alternative: The project will place no demands for government services.
19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS: Are there State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, etc. zoning or	No Action Alternative: No impacts would occur to the locally adopted environmental plans or goals under this alternative.

management plans in effect?	Action Alternative; The project will not impact locally adopted environmental plans and goals. The United States Department of Agriculture agencies (Farm Service Agency, Natural Resources and Conservation Service) will review this crested wheatgrass conversion to agriculture request by Bruce Riggin. The writer of this document envisions that they will approve of the land breaking request with their specific management plan of operation.
20. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES: Are wilderness or recreational areas nearby or accessed through this tract? Is there recreational potential within the tract?	No Action Alternative: No impacts would occur to access and quality or recreation associated with the State land under this alternative. Action Alternative: The project area has minimal recreational values, minimal upland bird and waterfowl hunting in its current status. The land breaking for dryland agriculture project will have minimal impacts to the recreational values associated with this tract of state land. There will be no impacts to recreational values on other bordering lands. The bordering lands contain habitat for upland birds, waterfowl and pronghorn antelope. The bordering lands will provide hunting recreational values for upland, birds, waterfowl and pronghorn antelope.
21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING: Will the project add to the population and require additional housing?	No Action Alternative; No impacts will occur to density and distribution of population and housing under this alternative. Action Alternative: The project will not impact the density and distribution of the population and housing on this rural area.
22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES: Is some disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities possible?	No Action Alternative; No impacts will occur to native or traditional lifestyles or communities under this alternative. Action Alternative: The project will not impact the social structures of the local communities.
23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY: Will the action cause a shift in some unique quality of the area?	No Action Alternative: No impacts will occur to the cultural uniqueness and diversity under this alternative. Action Alternative: The project will not impact the cultural uniqueness and diversity of the State land. The project will not impact cultural uniqueness and diversity of the surrounding deeded lands.
24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:	No Action Alternative: Under this alternative there will be no social or economic impacts that would occur Action Alternative: The cumulative affects of this project provides economic benefit to Bruce Riggin and the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, State land School Trust Fund. The dryland agriculture acreage on the State land will increase the production of small grain, hay grain and pulse crops. The production of small grain and pulse crops will provide increased revenue for the surface lessee. The increased revenue will far exceed

	the current use as crested wheatgrass grazing land. The Department of Natural Resources will see additional revenue generated from this tract of State land for the School Trust.

EA Checklist Prepared By: \S\ Randy Dirkson Land Use Specialist Date: 12/1/16

IV. FINDING	
25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:	Action Alternative
26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:	No significant or potential negative impacts are anticipated.
27. Need for Further Environmental Analysis: [ ] EIS [ ] More Detailed EA [X] No Further Analysis	

EA Checklist Approved By: Matthew Poole (Name) Glasgow Unit Manager (Title)

s/Matthew Poole\s (Signature) Date: December 1, 2016